

## **Amendments to the Claims**

### **Listing of Claims:**

Claims 1 - 15 (canceled)

Claim 16 (new): A method of determining a load characteristic ( $K_1$ ) indicating a load level on an electrical primary component (2) of an electrical power distribution network, the method which comprises:

recording description values ( $\tilde{M}$ ) describing an operating state of the primary component by way of a sensor (3) connected to a field appliance (5) carrying out functions related to an automation of the power distribution network;

determining an overall sum of the description values ( $\tilde{M}$ ) over a duration of at least one predeterminable time interval to form a load intermediate value ( $K^*$ );  
and

producing the load characteristic ( $K_1$ ) in dependence on a magnitude of the load intermediate value ( $K^*$ ) in comparison with a predeterminable load limit value.

Claim 17 (new): The method according to claim 16, which comprises outputting the load characteristic ( $K_1$ ) from the field appliance (5) or from a data processing device (10) connected to the field appliance (5).

Claim 18 (new): The method according to claim 16, which comprises producing a load signal ( $W_1$ ) and emitting the load signal ( $W_1$ ) from the field appliance (5) or from a data processing device (10) connected to the field appliance (5), as a function of the magnitude of the load characteristic ( $K_1$ ), when the load characteristic ( $K_1$ ) indicates that the load on the primary component (2) is particularly low and/or particularly high.

Claim 19 (new): The method according to claim 16, which comprises utilizing a sensor that is already present in the automation system to record the description

values ( $\tilde{M}$ ).

Claim 20 (new): The method according to claim 16, which comprises using as description values ( $\tilde{M}$ ) measured values of a primary measurement variable.

Claim 21 (new): The method according to claim 20, wherein the primary measurement variable is a current through the primary component (2).

Claim 22 (new): The method according to claim 20, wherein the primary measurement variable is a voltage applied to the primary component (2).

Claim 23 (new): The method according to claim 20, wherein the primary measurement variable is a temperature of the primary component (2).

Claim 24 (new): The method according to claim 16, which comprises:

- repeatedly producing the load characteristic ( $K_1$ ); and
- adding successive load intermediate values ( $K^*$ ) in a sum memory (13) to form an aging characteristic ( $K_2$ ).

Claim 25 (new): The method according to claim 24, which comprises outputting the aging characteristic ( $K_2$ ) from the field appliance (5) or from a data processing device (10) connected to the field appliance (5).

Claim 26 (new): The method according to claim 24, which comprises:

- generating, with the field appliance (5) or a data processing device (10) connected to the field appliance (5), an aging signal ( $W_2$ ) as a function of a magnitude of the aging characteristic ( $K_2$ ) in comparison with a predetermined aging limit value; and

- outputting the aging signal ( $W_2$ ) from the field appliance (5) or the data processing device (10).

Claim 27 (new): The method according to claim 24, which comprises setting a sum memory (13) to zero value on starting up the primary component (2).

Claim 28 (new): The method according to claim 24, which comprises setting a sum memory (13) to a start value on starting up the primary component (2), the start value taking account of a previous use of the primary component (2).

Claim 29 (new): The method according to claim 24, wherein the primary component is a circuit breaker (2a) with switching contacts, and the method comprises determining the description values ( $\tilde{M}$ ) in each case only while the switching contacts of the circuit breaker (2a) are open.

Claim 30 (new): The method according to claim 16, wherein the primary component is a circuit breaker (2a) and the method further comprises:

- determining a number of switching processes carried out by the circuit breaker (2a) with the field appliance (5);

- determining an aging switching value (A) from the number of switching processes; and

- outputting the aging switching value (A) or a warning message derived therefrom with the field appliance (5) or with a data processing device (10) connected to the field appliance (5).